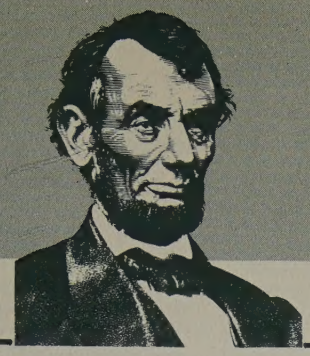

Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN'S BANK CHECKS

Abraham Lincoln maintained a personal checking account with three different banks, the Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company of Springfield, Illinois; Riggs & Company; and the First National Bank of Washington, D. C. Lincoln opened his first checking account with the Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company on March 1, 1853 when he deposited $310. This deposit was withdrawn five weeks later.

Under the Illinois Constitution of 1847 stringent provisions were set up for the chartering of banks (people could not forget their unhappy experience with state banks) and to get around the impractical procedures the legislature found it expedient to charter in Springfield an insurance company and to grant it the powers usually exercised by banks. This accounts for the peculiar title of Lincoln's first bank, which is known today as the Springfield Marine Bank (name was changed on May 5, 1884), the oldest institution of its kind in Illinois. It opened its doors for business early in July of 1851.

At this early date banking institutions had established no collection procedures and in order to send money out of the city it was necessary to purchase drafts — a system which Lincoln followed. The law firm of Lincoln & Herndon also had an account with the insurance company solely for the purchase and the collection of drafts. This is indicated by the withdrawals that were made by Lincoln and Herndon shortly after the funds were deposited. Lincoln made little use of his bank account immediately after he had established it. He did make a second deposit of $400 on October 11, 1853 but he withdrew that amount on November 18th. However, in the latter years of the 1850's and the first half of the 1860's he availed himself of the banks facilities. From the period of 1853 to 1861 Lincoln made some 61 deposits. Robert Irwin, cashier, who handled Lincoln's Illinois finances after he became president, made some 27 additional deposits between the years 1861 to 1865.

The withdrawals from Lincoln's account from 1853 to 1865 number about 365, a great number of which were made by Robert Irwin, and the last one was made by David Davis, the administrator who closed the account on May 27, 1867. The sum on deposit amounted to $9,048.64 (another figure is $9,044.41) about one tenth of Lincoln's estate. Some of the minute details of Lincoln's finances are to be found in Ida M. Tarbell's biography "The Life of Abraham Lincoln," The Macmillan Company, 1928, Volume II, (Appendix) "Abraham Lincoln's Money Sense," pages 502-515, and Harry E. Pratt's work "The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln," The Abraham Lincoln Association, 1943, pages 162-178. Apparently Lincoln did not number his Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company checks, a bad practice which he gave up while residing in Washington, D. C.

Lincoln opened his second checking account with Riggs & Co. (established in Washington, D. C., in 1836) on April 5, 1861 after depositing his first salary warrant with that banking institution. The bank's records reveal that he deposited 17 other salary warrants with Riggs & Co., the last dated January 31, 1865. In addition to salary warrants Lincoln made 4 other deposits, two of which were for amounts of $650. He wrote a total of 221 (another figure is 222) checks (personal account) on Riggs & Co., for a total of $37,423.31. All told while in Washington Lincoln wrote a total of 234 bank checks, of these 221 on Riggs & Co., 11 on Riggs & Co. "Hospital Fund" and 2 on the First National Bank of Washington.

Lincoln overdrew his account at least twice, however none of his checks bounced. At one time his overdrafts amounted to $2,141.14. In the 1860's banks were permitted to be very lenient with their customers, and of course a presidential account received special treatment. The reason Lincoln was overdrawn was due to his failure to deposit on time his presidential pay checks. When Lincoln died his balance at Riggs & Co., amounted to $1,373.53 which was paid to Judge David Davis, administrator of the estate on July 25, 1865.

The president also had at Riggs & Co. a special "A Lincoln Hospital Fund." In a *Saturday Evening Post* article, February 14, 1953 "We Found Lincoln's Lost Bank Account" by Roland T. Carr (vice-president of the Riggs National Bank) and Hugh Morrow, the discovery of this mysterious account was revealed. The president opened this account on August 20, 1862 with a $1,000 deposit. Two months later he made a second deposit of $1,000. Lincoln wrote 11 checks against this account, all but one prior to Christmas of 1862. The last check was dated January 9, 1863, leaving a balance of $201.80. It is believed the money deposited in this account was contributed for hospital use to be dispersed by Lincoln. Davis could not claim the money as it was not a part of the Lincoln estate and apparently Lincoln forgot all about the balance of $201.80. In 1875 Riggs & Co. converted the balance to the general assets of the bank, along with other "dead" Civil War accounts. Of course, it was understood that such

Present owner unknown

This check was made payable in "current bank bills" indicating that the Marine Bank alone was responsible for the currency issued.

balances would be paid if proper claimants appeared.

The president's third checking account was with the First National Bank of Washington. This banking institution was a subsidiary of Jay Cooke & Co., which failed in the panic of 1873. Lincoln's salary warrant for $1,981.66 for August 1864 was probably deposited there by error. The deposit was made by the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, George Harrington, who handled the president's personal finances the last ten months of his life. From this account Lincoln drew two checks for $800, one in March and one in April of 1865. The balance of $381.66 was turned over to the executor of the estate.

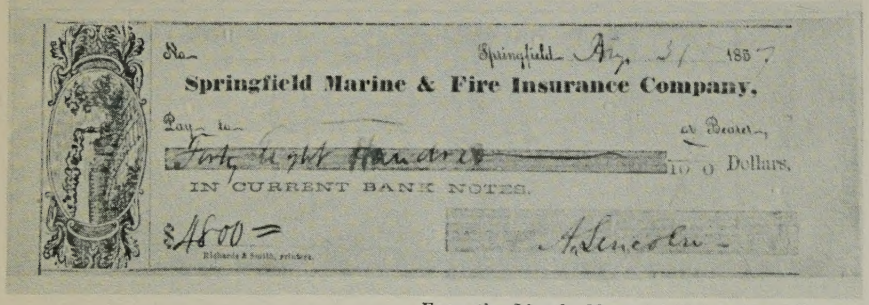
This preliminary information is important for those interested in the bank checks that Lincoln wrote. It is obvious that the rarest (not the most valuable) of all Lincoln bank checks are the two drawn for $800 each from the First National Bank of Washington. The April check (No. 2) is of particular interest as it is dated April 13, 1865 which was the day before Lincoln's assassination. It was discovered in 1927 and was purchased by Thomas F. Madigan, a New York dealer in autographs. The check eventually became the property of John Sherwin, chairman of the board of directors of the Union Trust Company of Cleveland, Ohio.

The Lincoln check for the largest amount of money drawn from the Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company is dated August 31, 1857 and is for $4,800. This was the fee Lincoln received from the Illinois Central Railroad Company for his work in the famous Illinois Central vs. McLean County case. The fee was $5,000 but apparently both Lincoln and the railway officials had forgotten that the retainer was for $250, instead of $200. When Lincoln withdrew the $4,800 he gave half of it to his law partner, William H. Herndon, and then purchased a draft on H. A. Tucker & Co., Chicago with the remaining $2,400 plus $100. This was money he loaned to Norman B. Judd of Chicago on September 1, 1857. For this loan Judd paid Lincoln no interest until the principal was paid to the estate eight years later. This original check is in the Lincoln Memorial University Collection at Harrogate, Tennessee.

Lincoln had the knack of injecting something of his own personality into some of his bank checks. On August 28, 1861 he wrote on Riggs & Co. a $3 check for Mr. Johns (a sick man). The Foundation has an excellent facsimile of this check No. 41 which is the property of The Riggs National Bank of Washington D. C.

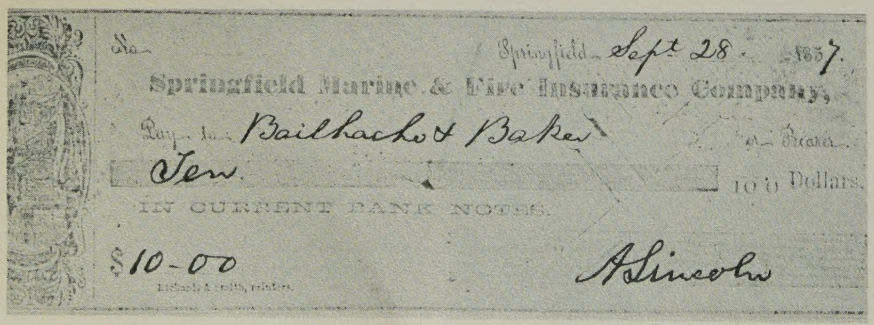
On March 10, 1862 Lincoln wrote a $5 check payable to his son "Tad" (when he is well enough to present). This check (No. 79) has great human interest because of the father and son relationship and it is one of the prized documents in the collection of William H. Townsend of Lexington, Kentucky.

In January, 1930 the Angelus Autograph Agency of Los Angeles, California, received a thirty day option on this check for "Tad" and offered it for sale at $1,000. It is a Riggs & Co. blue bordered check with a picture of the banking house on the left.



From the Lincoln Memorial University Collection, Harrogate, Tennessee

This check represents the largest fee Lincoln ever received as a lawyer (Illinois Central vs McLean County).



Present owner unknown

This check was made payable to Bailhache & Baker, then the owners and publishers of the *Illinois State Journal*. Ten dollars was the sum called for and like the check dated January 18, 1856 was payable in current bank notes.

A letter from Robert T. Lincoln further authenticates the item:

N. 1 Main Bank Bldg.
154 Lake Street
Chicago, Ill.
March 25, 1870

Robert T. Lincoln
Atty-at-Law
C. C. P. Holden, Esq.

Dear Sir:

According to my promise of yesterday I enclose an autograph check of my father's which by its date and wording was eventually given to bribe my brother (when nine years old) to take his medicine.

Very truly yours,
Robert T. Lincoln

The check was described in 1930 as being in good condition except slightly cracked in the folds. There was also an acknowledgment from Mr. Holden's wife that the check and letter from Robert T. Lincoln were genuine and that they were kept by her late husband in a safety deposit box and by her in the same place since Mr. Holden's death. She further stated that the check was given to C. C. P. Holden owing to his close friendship with Mr. (Robert T.) Lincoln. It is believed, however no evidence is available to substantiate the claim, that C. C. P. Holden was the grand marshal of Lincoln's funeral procession in Chicago.

Lincoln is known to have written at least one other check for Tad, for "one gold dollar," and an eight dollar check payable to "William" which might have been his son Willie. The check is dated prior to the death of Willie. However, the check could have been payable to William Johnson, the negro valet. Other unusual checks written by Lincoln are payable to "Lucy (colored woman)," "Self for Robert," and "Rev. Dr. Gurley (for church)." One check bears the notation "Horse for Bob."

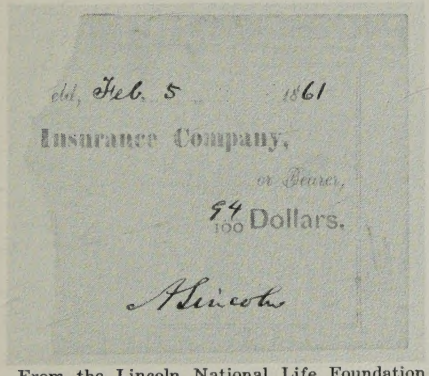
The day following the issuance of the check to "Tad", Lincoln wrote a check (No. 80) to "William Johnson (colored)." This check dated March 11, 1862 was for $5. William Johnson was employed by Lincoln as a handy man and private messenger. John E. Washington in his book "They Knew Lincoln," E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1942 devoted an entire chapter to William Johnson. This check was sold at the Parke-Bernet Gallery at a sale held on January 23, 1941. It is now the property of the Illinois State Historical Library at Springfield, Illinois. There is no endorsement on the back and it is believed that it was cashed at the bank the day it was written. On August 11, 1863 Lincoln wrote a check (No. 52) on Riggs & Co. payable to a "Colored man, with one leg." This check was for $5. According to the *Washington Star*, February 11, 1917, this check was not drawn by the bank against Lincoln's account—instead it "was ultimately paid out of the pocket of some teller of the Riggs National and preserved as a souvenir . . ." It is presumed that President Lincoln did not know the name of the negro to whom he gave the $5, yet he wished to make sure the man would have no trouble in re-

ceiving the money at the bank. Excellent facsimiles of the lost original check are extant. Mr. Roland T. Carr, senior vice president of The Riggs National Bank wrote an article for the May, 1959 issue of *The American Mercury* magazine which details the background of his unsuccessful search for the "colored man" check, which may, indeed, be one of the most valuable checks Lincoln ever wrote.

Conflicting stories about the check payable to a "Colored man with one leg" have appeared in different newspapers. One article by Jack Foster, *Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, Colorado, August 10, 1952, states that this check has been missing for "some 50 years from the files of the Riggs National Bank in Washington, D. C." It was the Ida M. Tarbell biography "The Life of Abraham Lincoln," The Doubleday & McClure Co., 1900 (copyrighted 1895), volume II, page 151, that brought attention to the check: "Many applications reached Lincoln as he passed to and from the White House and the War Department. One day as he crossed the park he was stopped by a negro who told him a pitiful story. The president wrote him out a check for five dollars 'Pay to colored man with one leg,' it read. This check is now in the collection of H. H. Officee of Denver, Colorado." Mention of this check was also made by Miss Tarbell in the Appendix of her 1928 edition of the same biography on page 515.

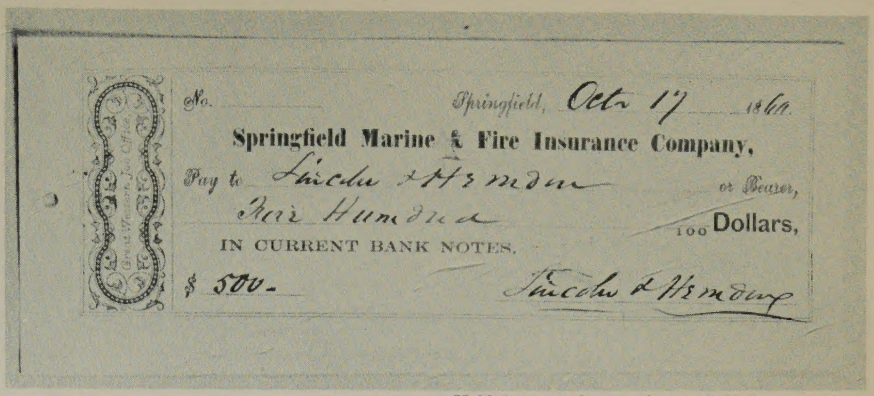
This publicity of the check caused the officials of the Riggs National Bank to institute a search for the original. According to the Denver, Colorado, Times, June 23, 1897, H. H. Officee was a private secretary to Robert T. Lincoln. One day a check "drawn on the old banking house of Riggs & Co. of Washington" was discovered in a desk belonging to Mr. Lincoln and the "Keepsake was presented to the secretary." The Lincoln check, however, was not payable to a "Colored man, with one leg," instead it was dated April 24, 1863 and was payable to John Saunie for $4. This original check was presented to the custodian of the War Relic Room of the Colorado State Capitol.

It appears that a few of the checks on the Riggs bank, issued by Lincoln for small amounts were never cashed



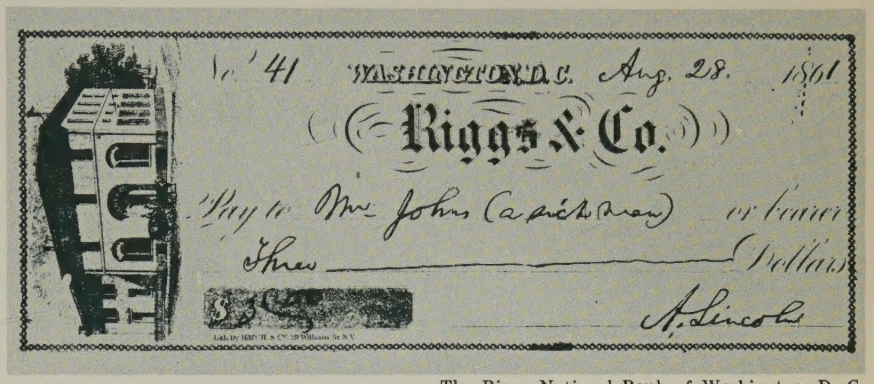
From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Fragment of a Lincoln bank check dated Feb. 5, 1861 for $149.94. No records are available as to whom payable.


Springfield, Oct 17 1860
Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company,
Pay to Lincoln & Herndon or Bearer,
Five Hundred 100 Dollars,
IN CURRENT BANK NOTES.
$ 500-
Lincoln & Herndon

Held in trust by the Springfield Marine Bank

The law firm of Lincoln & Herndon had an account with the Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company solely for the purchase and collection of drafts.



The Riggs National Bank of Washington, D. C.

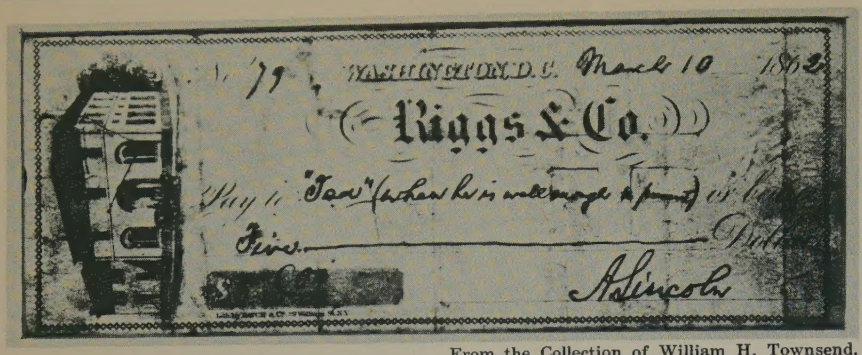
Lincoln had the knack of injecting something of his own personality into some of his bank checks.

but were retained as souvenirs. Such a check (No. 87) was issued by Lincoln on May 4, 1864 to Franklin & Co. This firm was a Washington, D. C. optical company from whom Lincoln purchased a pair of spectacles. The check for $2.50 was presented to Jules Heilprin, the proprietor. When Lincoln wrote this check he had a bank balance of $78.86. Heilprin never cashed the check, and after Lincoln's death had a limited number of copies made for distribution. According to an unidentified newspaper clipping the original check remained the property of Jules Heilprin during his life and has since become the property of William A. Heilprin, a grandson.

Throughout the life of Robert T. Lincoln he was constantly solicited for autographs of his father. Many times he supplied this demand with his father's cancelled checks. The Lincoln National Life Foundation has a fragment of a check which Lincoln drew on the Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company on February 5, 1861. As the withdrawals from Lincoln's personal account have been published it is known that this check was for $149.94. Robert Lincoln sent the check to S. M. Wright, a Lincoln collector, on April 24, 1911 along with the following letter: "Upon my return from quite an extended absence in the South, your letter of February 9th has been brought to my attention. I appreciate the purpose which you have in view, and it gives me pleasure to contribute towards it by sending the enclosed portion of a cancelled cheque written by my father under date of February 5th, 1861, and bearing his signature."

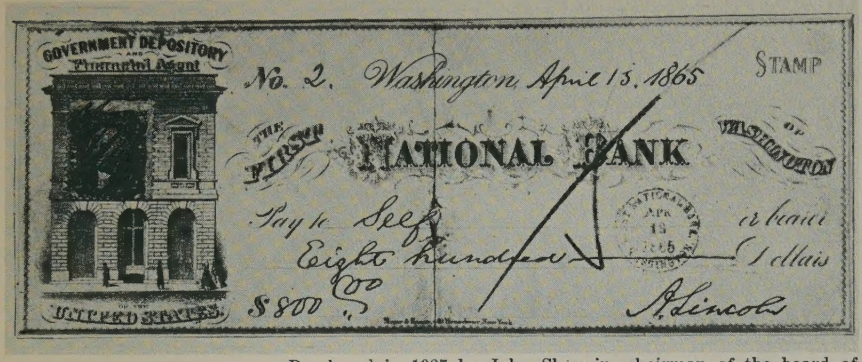
That Robert Lincoln made a practice of giving his father's cancelled checks to collectors is further attested by his letter to L. J. Cist of Saint Louis, Missouri, written from Chicago, Illinois, on November 17, 1868. In this letter Robert "regretted that he can supply nothing more than 'a check signature of my father.'"

In fact, Robert Lincoln had so many requests for his father's autograph that he very soon exhausted his supply. According to the *Washington Star*, February 11, 1917, in an article entitled, "An Odd Check Made Out By Lincoln" David Davis, Lincoln's administrator, left all of the president's cancelled checks in the possession of the Riggs National Bank. The unidentified author of the article wrote that "Thus it was that years after, when Robert Lincoln, eldest son of the great President called on Charles Glover, now president of the Riggs National Bank, and in the course of conversation expressed regret that his father had left so very few personal mementoes, he was made happy by being given a large batch of cancelled checks, and he expressed the keenest satisfaction at his find. One of the first checks he looked at was one for $300 to the order of a Virginia horseman, and Robert Lincoln told Mr. Glover that that check was for the horse which the young Lincoln rode when Lee surrendered at Appomattox." This must have been the



From the Collection of William H. Townsend, Lexington, Kentucky

Lincoln's bribe to "Tad" to take his medicine.



Purchased in 1927 by John Sherwin, chairman of the board of directors of the Union Trust Company of Cleveland, Ohio

Lincoln's last check written the day before his assassination.

check bearing the Lincoln notation "Horse for Bob."

The Lincoln National Life Foundation has an original bank check which Lincoln probably endorsed on April 14, 1865, the day of his assassination. The check was drawn on the Western Bank of Philadelphia for $500 by Eli K. Price. It is check No. 8331 and is made payable to A. Lincoln or order. The date of the check is April 13, 1865. On the back is the single endorsement "A. Lincoln" (see *Lincoln Lore* No. 444 "Lincoln's Last Writing," October 11, 1937).

Price was a Philadelphia lawyer who was admitted to the bar in 1822. His field was real estate and he was active in practice for sixty years. It has been discovered that he was prominent in philosophical and historical circles, but from all indications he had no interest in politics. The reason he made this $500 payment to Lincoln can result only in interesting speculations.

Lincoln's activities during the last twenty-four hours of his life have received intensive study and many of his memorandums and autographs, written on April 14, have been preserved. Of course, there is no way of discovering at what time Lincoln endorsed the Price check but it is likely that he received it in Friday's morning mail and that it demanded his attention early in the day.

Over the years the Foundation has compiled a collection of Lincoln's bank checks in facsimile. While the list is by no means complete it is, nevertheless, of considerable interest:

Dec. 19, 1855
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $41.72
Payable to W. W. Watson & Son

Jan 18, 1856
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $53.64
Payable to Self
Original check owned by A. W. Hannah, Springfield, Ill.

Dec. 16, 1856
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $970.00
Payable to Francis & Pariell
Original check owned by the Springfield Marine Bank

March 14, 1857 (Sight Draft)
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $300.00
Payable to Robert Irvin
Original draft owned by the Illinois State Historical Library

Aug. 28, 1857
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $200.00
Payable to J. A. Mattison

Aug. 31, 1857
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $4,800.00
Payable to (Self)
Original check owned by Lincoln Memorial University

Sept. 28, 1857
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $10.00
Payable to Bailhache & Baker

Sept. 28, 1857
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $23.00
Payable to W. H. Herndon
Original check owned by the Illinois State Historical Society

Sept. 29, 1857
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $200.00
Payable to Jacob Ruckel
Original check owned by the Springfield Marine Bank

Feb. 23, 1858
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $300.00
Payable to Selves
Original check owned by the Springfield Marine Bank

Jan. 7, 1859
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $100.00
Payable to Lincoln & Herndon (Herndon's handwriting)
Original check owned by the Springfield Marine Bank

Jan. 7, 1859
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $2,029.34
Payable to Lincoln & Herndon (Herndon's handwriting)
Original check owned by the Springfield Marine Bank

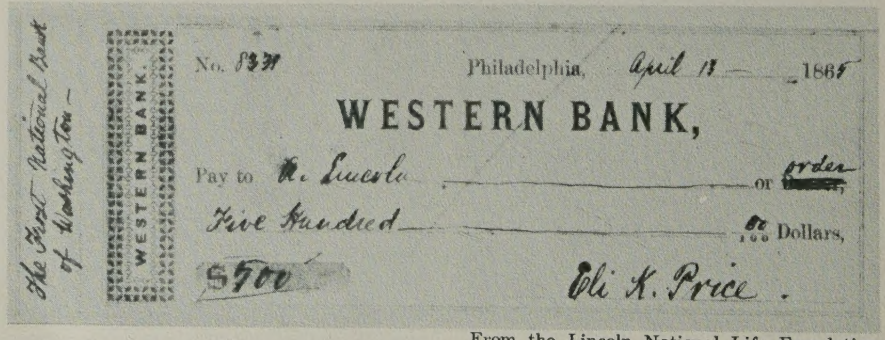
Jan. 14, 1859
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $6.00
Payable to N. C. Gear
Original check owned by the Illinois State Historical Society

May 2, 1859
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $6.00
Payable to R. T. Lincoln

June 10, 1859
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $30.45
Payable to W. B. Farnham

Oct. 17, 1859
No. (?) Springfield Marine & Fire Insurance Company $500.00
Payable to Lincoln & Herndon
Original check held in trust by the Springfield Marine Bank

(To be continued in December issue)



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This check dated April 13, 1865 was likely received by Lincoln on April 14th in the morning mail. He probably endorsed this early in the day. (Endorsement appears on reverse side).